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No. 420

A Little Fowl Play

A FARCICAL COMEDY IN ONE ACT

BY HAROLD OWEN

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SAMUEL FRENCH, 25 West 45th Street, New York City

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A LITTLE FOWL PLAY

Played at the Coliseum, London, on Monday,
October 28, 1912, with the following cast of charac-
ters :—

GILBERT WARREN	Mr. Charles Hawtrey.
SYBIL WARREN	Miss Ivy Williams.
MR. TOLBOOTH	Mr. Leslie Rea.
MARY	Miss Gertrude Thornton.
BOY	Master Noel Coward.

SCENE.—GILBERT WARREN'S *Study*, 13, *Balfour Mansions*, *Balham*.

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A LITTLE FOWL PLAY

SCENE.—GILBERT WARREN'S Study, 13, Balfour Mansions, Balham. Evening.

The room is furnished inexpensively, but in good taste. Books line the walls. The most conspicuous article of furniture is a writing-table littered with papers, at the back, and on it rests a telephone instrument.

To the left of the writing-table is a double door space, with no doors, but looped curtains drawn across it, and revealing, when open, a fairly wide hall.

Fireplace L., and below it is another door, used only for one entrance, by SYBIL, with, "Well, is the deed done?"

Immediately opposite, in the right wall, is another door, used mainly by MARY. Lounge seat on the right below door R., and easy chair L.

Discover SYBIL, sitting L., restless, and book in hand. A ring is heard, repeated peremptorily. SYBIL closes her book, and rises in agitation.

SYBIL. Oh, dear, oh, dear! I wonder what fresh trouble this is? (She crosses R.)

(Enter MARY, back.)

MARY. Please, m'm, a parcel, mum—from the draper's.

SYBIL. A parcel? Oh, very well, Mary. Put it in my room.

MARY. But I don't think the boy will leave it, without—without you see him, mum. He's got the bill with him, m'm.

SYBIL. Then let him take it away.

MARY. The bill, mum?

SYBIL. Yes, and the parcel too, if he likes.

(Exit MARY, back.)

(SYBIL crosses L., and sits down, her hands clasped together, in distress.)

SYBIL. Oh, this awful little pinch of poverty! If only one knew it would come right, I could bear it.

(Re-enter MARY, back.)

MARY (speaking as she enters, indignantly). Saucy wretch! Please, m'm, what about dinner, m'm? Just on seven, and no meat come, m'm.

SYBIL. What, Mary? Not even yet?

MARY. No, m'm.

SYBIL. I—I don't understand it.

MARY. Hadn't I better go round and see the butchers, m'm? Master'll be blowin' of me up again, m'm.

SYBIL (rising hastily). No! Oh, no, Mary! (with an effort at dignity). If tradesmen do not choose to execute their orders in proper time . . . well, they must take the consequences.

MARY. Yes, m'm. Serve 'em right, m'm. Only what about us, m'm?

SYBIL. I feel very angry about it—really most fearfully angry!

A LITTLE FOWL PLAY.

●

MARY. Yes, m'm. But I was only wondering, m'm, whether master mightn't perhaps have forgot to give the order this morning, m'm.

SYBIL (*sitting L.*). No, impossible—quite impossible, Mary. (*Improvising an explanation with difficulty*) He said he would be passing the shop when he went out, and as they had forgotten to call for orders he said he would just call and pay the bill . . . and leave the order at the same time. So if he called to do one thing he would hardly forget the other.

MARY. No, m'm. Not unless he forgot both. There's his key now, m'm.

SYBIL. Ah, well, we shall soon see.

(*Enter GILBERT WARREN, back. He is an alert and good-looking man of thirty.*)

MARY *sidles away from the doorway to allow him to enter. He looks from one to the other a little apprehensively, then kisses SYBIL, who has risen to meet him.*

(*At their kiss, MARY puts her hand over her mouth, with a gesture.*)

SYBIL. Mary has just come in, dear, to say that the butcher's . . .

GILBERT. Why, what?

MARY (*as SYBIL does not speak*). Forgot the meat, sir.

GILBERT. Forgot . . . the . . . meat! Impossible! Oh, nonsense, Mary! Go and have another look!

MARY. There's nothing to look at, sir. I've been waiting a whole hour for it, and the taters all ready to go on.

(*Awkward pause.*)

(*GILBERT looks helplessly at SYBIL.*)

SYBIL. Very well, Mary. (*Signal for her to go.*)

MARY (*hesitating*). Hadn't I better go round, m'm—and give 'em a good talking to, sir?

GILBERT. No, leave that to me—I'll do the talking. We'll give them another half hour (*determined voice*) and if nothing happens then . . . why, we'll go *without dinner* rather than encourage such carelessness. (*Moro cheerfully*.) Meanwhile, Mary, since the times are out of joint, put on the vegetables.

MARY (*half apologetically*). There's only the taters, m'm.

GILBERT (*covering up his mistake by a blustering manner*). Potatoes! Well, aren't they vegetables, girl? Aren't they vegetables?

MARY. Not really by rights, sir—only when it's two vegg's, sir.

GILBERT. Well, cook twice as many, then! And get out!

(Exit MARY, R.)

(SYBIL immediately bursts into tears. GILBERT, wearied and troubled, passes his fingers through his hair, and then kneels to comfort her.)

GILBERT. My darling . . . for Heaven's sake . . .!

SYBIL (*through her hands, between sobs*). Well—I can't . . . stand it, dear! Of course, the girl knows!

GILBERT (*rising*). Well, we'll get rid of her. In fact, we must, till things turn round. I'd give her the sack on the spot if only—if only I could *pay* her on the spot. (*Bending over SYBIL*.) But don't make it worse for me, dearest. Those tears scald my soul—to quote from my own unpublished masterpiece!

SYBIL (*still sobbing*). Leave me alone, dear. I must have my cry out. I shall be better then.

GILBERT (*cheery voice, moving centre*). Go it, then and get it over!

(Pause. He rumples his hair in his vexation.)

Of course, I did call on those damned butchers ~~tl~~ **tl** is morning, Syb.

SYBIL. Yes, and—and they told you—they wouldn't—wouldn't send any more!

GILBERT. No, I didn't go inside the shop to give them the chance. There was a man swabbing a block outside, and I gasped out the order to him and hurried on. But I *did* think they'd send it after I'd promised them something on account this week! (*Another gloomy pause.*) That cursed cashier at the *Herald*! I asked him for it as a favour—made an excuse, just to keep my end up—told him I wanted to buy a new set of tyres. "What for?" he said, "for the perambulator?" The brute! And I haven't met a single soul all day that I could ask for a fiver! Journalists dress so elegantly nowadays they've no money left to lend their friends! There! (*moving towards* SYBIL). I'm glad you're through with it.

SYBIL. I couldn't help it, darling. I don't mind what we go through ourselves, really, but to have a servant . . .! Boo-hoo . . .!

GILBERT. Oh, damn the girl! (*Pause.*) I'd sell the copyright of every book I've written for a ten pound note! (*making a cheery effort.*) Oh, by the way, dear, I called on the agents, and they said they were very hopeful that North & West will take *Twin Souls*. They're a new firm in the publishing world, you know, and quite on the look-out for hidden talent . . .

(*He catches sight of SYBIL's melancholy face.*)

Oh, I know you've heard all that before, but you might pretend you hadn't!

SYBIL (*springing up and putting her arms about him*). Dearest! I don't mind! I dare say Shakespeare was hard up to begin with. And we shall have years and years of happiness and comfort in which to look back on these dreadful weeks, and it will all seem so comical . . . (*Her effort to be gay breaks down.*)

GILBERT. Comical! Of course it's comical! I

feel the humour of it keenly. Here I am, a man with a high, intellectual brainy brow—in places—and literary talents that would amount to genius—except that I am much too sane—and I am three pound fourteen overdrawn at the Bank and haven't the change for sixpence in my pocket!

(Slight pause. He recovers his spirits immediately.)

Well, apart from potatoes and stale bread, what is there to eat in the house?

SYBIL *(gaily)*. The banana . . .

GILBERT. The banana! Still with us? That's good!

SYBIL. A few sticks of macaroni, not quite enough rice for a small pudding, and two apples!

GILBERT. H'm! I don't think I'll trouble to dress for dinner! *(Suddenly.)* I tell you what. You must make Mary have a night out, and we'll dine like they do on the stage—a lot of conversation and a nibble now and then! But clear Mary out!

SYBIL. But I can't! She had her evening out last night!

GILBERT. Well, give her another! *Make her have it!*

(Ring heard off.)

Who the deuce is this? Make her have it! Tell her it's stopped raining and stand no nonsense! And I'll take you to the Franco-Swiss restaurant round the corner! *(Ring again.)* If I tip the wink to madame—or better still *(diving his hand in his pocket)*, if I could only tip the waiter rather more handsomely than is usual in these parts . . . *(counts coin in his hands)*. Fourpence! Well, he'll stand on his head for fourpence! That'll be all right!

(Re-enter MARY, back, letter on tray.)

MARY *(presenting letter to GILBERT)*. The boy from

the butchers, sir. He says they'd be pleased if you'd kindly give them an answer!

GILBERT (*taking note*). From the butchers, eh?

(*He turns to SYBIL as he opens the note.*)

An abject apology, I suppose. But I shan't accept it! (*Reading note in a murmur.*) "Sir, unless we receive . . ." Yes, I thought so. You expect a joint, and they send you an apology! (*To MARY.*) I don't want their apologies . . . won't accept them! Tell him I'm too indignant to attend to the matter—much too indignant! Can you remember that?

MARY (*impressed*). Yes, sir (*stumbling over the word*). Much too indigent to attend to the matter.

GILBERT. Indigent! (*impatiently*). Oh, I'll see him myself!

(*Exit GILBERT, back.*)

SYBIL. You know that I attend to these domestic matters, Mary. You shouldn't worry your master.

(*GILBERT'S voice, in anger, is heard off.*)

MARY. Please, m'm, I started blowing of the boy up about the joint, m'm, and he said master had remembered to give the order but forgot to pay the bill.

(*Violent door slam heard off.*)

SYBIL. Oh, well, I suppose the two things have somehow got mixed up.

(*Re-enter GILBERT, back.*)

GILBERT (*to MARY*). Clear out! (*He repents his tone and calls her back.*) Mary!

MARY. Yes, sir?

GILBERT. You've got a friend near here, haven't you?

MARY. Yes, sir, Medusa Mansions, sir.

GILBERT. Well, you can go and have an evening out with Medusa.

SYBIL. But, Gilbert . . .

GILBERT. No, my dear, I can't put up with any more insolence from these meat-purveying people. We will go to the Savoy for dinner, and Mary (*in a tone of the greatest magnanimity*) can go and see her friend!

MARY. We aren't friends now, sir.

GILBERT. Oh? Then you can go and make it up with her. An excellent opportunity.

MARY. But we've quarrelled over the same young man, sir. (*Simper.*) Neither of us is friends with her now, sir. She doesn't know how to be've like a lady, sir.

GILBERT. Well, you can devote the entire evening to telling her so.

(*Ring heard off. Exit MARY, R.*)

SYBIL. You mustn't do that, Gilbert. The girl will get quite out of hand.

GILBERT (*doggedly*). That may be. But she's got to be got out of the way. Either we give the show away by dining on mashed potatoes at home . . .

SYBIL. There's hardly a scrap of butter to mash them with.

GILBERT. Very well. Then we'll dine at the Franco-Swiss restaurant on the nod!

SYBIL. Gilbert, I couldn't! Every morsel would choke me!

GILBERT. Nonsense! The morsels they give you there aren't large enough to choke a fly!

(*Re-enter MARY, parcel in hand.*)

(*GILBERT throws himself on lounge R., looking peevish and gloomy.*)

MARY. If you please, m'm, a boy wishes to know if you'd kindly take in this parcel for next door flat.

For number 12. He says he's been twice and can't make them hear nohow.

SYBIL. Very well, Mary.

GILBERT (*looking at parcel*). What is it? Taking in people's parcels! This isn't a cloak-room. What is it?

MARY (*with unction*). A chicking, sir.

(GILBERT starts, and looks from one to the other. There is a pause. Then GILBERT rises and approaches MARY almost stealthily.)

GILBERT. A chicken did I hear you say? Let me look at it.

(*He takes parcel—a rush bag—and takes out a chicken.*)¹

Chicken! It's a Surrey capon—four pounds if it's an ounce! (*Reading from label attached.*) "12, Balfour Mansions. From Cook & Co., poulterers. Four and sixpence. Paid!"

(*He hands the chicken to MARY with a sigh.*)

Paid!

SYBIL (*sadly, but with well-bred composure*). Very well, Mary. Better put it to keep coal in the larder.

MARY. Yes, m'm. (*Pauses at the door.*) It's a very fine bird!

(*Exit MARY, R.*)

(GILBERT and SYBIL stand looking at each other almost guiltily. Not a word is spoken for some time.)

GILBERT (*slowly*). I know exactly what you are thinking of, Sybil.

SYBIL (*starting, as if suddenly detected*). No, I wasn't!

GILBERT. Oh, yes, you were! And so was I! You were thinking how much better it would be to get

¹ If any difficulty is experienced in getting a chicken, it is not necessary for the bird to be taken out of the rush bag.

hot in the oven than to be kept cool in the larder!

SYBIL. No, I wasn't—not really! I was only . . . envying them!

GILBERT. Poor little dear! (*Walks about.*) Damn the chicken! I wish I'd never seen the thing! (*Suddenly.*) Look here, Syb, it's a mistake! It *can't* be for Number 12! They've all gone away! I saw the missus and the kids having their holiday boxes shoved on a growler this morning, and it can't be for Mr . . . well, whatever-his-German-name-is! No man packs his family off to the sea-side in order to surreptitiously enjoy a chicken—not even a German! It's some mistake, I tell you!

SYBIL. Then whom do you think it's for?

GILBERT. I don't know. And I don't care! But I think it's a Godsend! (*Impressively.*) And it's a *paid for* Godsend! They won't come inquiring about it to-night, and to-morrow I'll raise some money somehow and go round and say the cat got at it, but that under the circumstances I'm willing to pay . . .

SYBIL. Oh, Gilbert, we couldn't! Really, we couldn't! It would be criminal!

GILBERT. Criminal! Not at all! How can it be criminal to take anything on your own premises? If a hen lays an egg in your back garden, whose egg is it?

SYBIL. The hen's!

GILBERT. No, it isn't! It's yours! There's a celebrated case on the very point—the King *v* Somebody-or-other—Crown Cases Reserved—Times Law Reports . . .

SYBIL (*unconvinced*). But, Gilbert, a chicken is not an egg!

GILBERT. It was once! Besides, can't you see that to leave that chicken calmly there would be flying right in the face of Providence? Here we are, two little ravens waiting to be fed—two hungry ravens—ravenously hungry—and food, sustenance, manna in the wilderness is positively thrust on us

through the front door! Are we to inquire too closely into the inscrutable workings of Providence? Are we, when a miracle actually happens, to remain sceptical and unconvinced? Are we, in the very face of a providential benefaction, to indulge in any hair-splitting casuistries about the strict legal ownership of a helpless and abandoned bird! . . . And a very fat and paid-for bird, too!

SYBIL. But, Gilbert, that Hyde Park oration is all very well, but it isn't *ours*! If it were claimed . . .!

GILBERT. Well, let's face that point. Do you suppose that in three weeks' time, when Number 12 comes back, they will make any anxious inquiries about it? In three weeks' time, mind you! With a heat wave on!

SYBIL. But you say it can't be for Number 12!

GILBERT. Well, so much the better. Then they won't come inquiring about it!

SYBIL. But I mean we ought to find out who it is for.

GILBERT. Eh? Oh, let's have dinner first!

SYBIL. No, now!

GILBERT. But, my dear girl, be reasonable! I can't be running up and down these flats tempting people with a derelict chicken! They might take it—to get rid of me!

SYBIL. But, dearest, you might find the rightful owner.

GILBERT. Quite so, dearest. But—that's—just—it!

SYBIL. Then if you don't, Mary shall! (*She rings.*)

GILBERT. But why be so desperately honest when I'm so desperately hungry?

SYBIL. Because I want to get it out of the house!

GILBERT. Ah! Poor little dear!

(*Re-enter MARY, R.*)

GILBERT. Mary, touching this matter of that chicken . . .

MARY. Yes, sir.

GILBERT. Well, it places us in somewhat of a difficulty. I am anxious at all times to oblige a neighbour, but there's the law to be considered . . .

MARY. Lor, sir!

GILBERT. And the law is very strict about allowing corpses to remain too long on unlicensed premises without being properly disposed of. And that applies equally to chickens. Only, chickens have to be cremated—that is, cooked! So will you kindly take that body from the larder, ring at No. 12 as a matter of formality, and upon getting no answer, you will immediately descend to No. 11, then to No. 10, and then to No. 9—no further—and you will ask each in turn if they expect a parcel. Don't say what it is . . .

SYBIL. Gilbert! Let Mary simply ask them if that is their chicken.

GILBERT. Eh? Very well. Only, don't *thrust* it on them!

MARY. No, sir.

GILBERT. Don't press it on anybody. Start by saying you don't think it *can* be theirs. Second thoughts—don't actually show it them—you know what people are. In fact, don't take it with you at all. Just refer to "a chicken" (*casual tone*). Say a *small* chicken. Or say a small bird—after all, it *is* a small bird compared to an ostrich.

MARY. Very well, sir. (*Repeating, in disdainful tone*) "A small bird."

GILBERT. Capital! That sounds like a sparrow!

(*Exit MARY, back.*)

SYBIL (*but with no heartiness*). There! You'll be better for not having it on your conscience!

GILBERT (*gloomily*). I didn't want it on my conscience! I wanted it lower down! Still, let's hope for the best. No 12 isn't there; 10's empty; 9's a bachelor; 11—all depends on them! I hope to

Heaven that Number II . . . ! I say, Sybil, the strain of the thing—the anxiety . . . ! I shan't have any appetite left for the bird.

(*Re-enter MARY, breathless.*)

MARY. Please, sir, twelve won't answer—flat's all dark, sir . . .

GILBERT (*to SYBIL*). What did I tell you?

MARY. . . . No more won't ten, sir—flat's empty, sir. Nine's a bachelor living by himself, sir, and a lady inside laughed when she heard me ask if he was expecting a little bird, sir, and he got very angry . . .

GILBERT. Well, and Number Eleven?

MARY. And Number II, sir, the maid said that as they hadn't got no company it couldn't be for them!

GILBERT. Ah! (*graciously*). That will do, Mary!

(*Exit MARY.*)

GILBERT (*decisively*). Well, my dear, we must accept this act of a bountiful Providence in the spirit in which it is offered—ungrudgingly, and in no mean or carping spirit! In fact, I think we ought to say grace to-night.

SYBIL. Gilbert, we can't! We mustn't! (*Pause.*) Besides, it may be tough!

GILBERT (*imperturbably*). Well, so much the better. It will take us longer to get through it!

SYBIL. And then, besides, Mary isn't a fool; if you think she is.

GILBERT. Mary! Pooh! I'll soon put things right with Mary! (*Goes to door R.*) Mary, bring that chicken here, *at once!*

SYBIL. If you do, I shall go out. I can't stay in the room while you are telling horrible lies to Mary!

GILBERT. Well, you silly, I can't tell her the truth!

(*Re-enter MARY, R., with chicken. SYBIL moves towards door L.*)

GILBERT (*addressing SYBIL*). Stupid of me, do you say? My dear, I tell you I'd clean forgotten I'd ever ordered the thing!

(*Exit SYBIL.*)

(*GILBERT still continues to address the door through which she has passed.*)

I said, "Hang it up for a day or two so that it will be nice and gamey," and I'd clean forgotten the blessed bird! (*To MARY.*) Mary, this is a very serious matter.

(*Takes chicken from her.*)

Here is a label which distinctly says, "13, Balfour Mansions"—a number which I believe is on our front door! (*Discreet grimace at MARY.*) Perhaps the 3 in 13 is not quite as well written as it might be, and I can quite understand that a stupid and half-educated boy might take it for a 2. But I'm surprised a sharp girl like yourself didn't see through it immediately.

MARY. I never gave it a second look, sir.

GILBERT (*taking label and tearing it up*). Well, there it is, and you needn't give it a second thought. However, I'll overlook it this time. But don't let such a thing occur again.

MARY (*innocently*). Well, sir, that would be rather too much to expect, wouldn't it, sir?

GILBERT. Mary, in this life you never know your luck! (*Briskly.*) And now shove it in the oven right away! Here we are—close on eight . . . (*Puts hand in watch-pocket.*) Confound that watch-maker fellow! Anyhow, jolly late. So look slippy!

(*MARY goes towards door R., then turns.*)

MARY (*same innocent air*). Well, a bird in the hand's worth two in the shop any day, isn't it, sir?

(*She continues to door.*)

GILBERT. Ah! (*calling her back*). Mary, you can't have a little lamb, because the butcher unfortunately forgot to send the joint. But you shall have a very nice slice of that chicken!

MARY (*at door*). Thank you, sir. (*Exit.*)

GILBERT. Smart girl, that!

(*Re-enter SYBIL, L.*)

SYBIL (*within doorway*). Well, is the deed done?

GILBERT. Yes, and the chicken's being done. So is the man who owns it!

SYBIL (*coming in*). Well, I'm so faint with hunger that I've got no conscience left. But, Gilbert, suppose some one were to call for it to-night, when we haven't a penny!

GILBERT. Well, if they'll only keep away for another hour we shall have eaten the evidence against us. (*Ring off.*) Now who the dickens . . .

SYBIL (*clinging to him*). Gilbert! Gilbert! They've come for it!

GILBERT. Don't distress yourself, my dear. I've not gone through the last half-hour for nothing!

(*Re-enter MARY, R.*)

MARY. Please, sir, a boy's come about a chicking.

GILBERT (*calmly*). Oh? How's it getting on?

MARY (*with unction*). Browning nicely, sir.

GILBERT. Good. And, what did you say to the boy?

MARY. I looked him up and down and said nothing, sir.

GILBERT. Quite right. Send him in here.

(*Exit MARY.*)

SYBIL. Oh, Gilbert! whatever shall we do? You see chickens, like curses, come home to roost.

GILBERT. No, they come home to roast!

(Enter BOY, seventeen, apron, back.)

GILBERT *(pouncing on him immediately)*. Boy, what the dickens do you mean by not sending that chicken earlier? Here we are, half-past . . . *(hand in watch-pocket again)* well, half-past something or other! Do you think we dine at midnight? Don't let it happen again. There's twopence for yourself.

(The BOY, bewildered, accepts the coppers mechanically.)

GILBERT. Well?

BOY *(gasping it out)*. The chicking, sir!

GILBERT. What about it? Is it a wrong 'un? Anything the matter with it?

BOY. I've come for the one that was left here by mistake, sir. For Number 12, sir!

GILBERT. For Number 12! But this is 13! Why didn't you say so before? You've got my twopence on false pretences.

BOY. But the other boy made a mistake, sir.

GILBERT *(soothing tone)*. Very well, I'll overlook it—I'll overlook it.

BOY. But it wasn't for Number 12 either, sir.

GILBERT. Wasn't it? Then go and tell them so! Don't come bothering me!

BOY. And the gentleman's a-waiting for his dinner, sir.

GILBERT. Well, so am I, for that matter. We all have to wait for dinner some time or other. You can keep the twopence this time.

(Exit BOY, back, hustled off by GILBERT.)

SYBIL. How cruel of you! The poor boy may lose his situation!

GILBERT (*callously*). Can't help that! We must keep everybody at bay till we've got four and sixpence in the blessed house!

(*Ring heard off.*)

SYBIL. Oh, dear, oh, dear! That bell!

GILBERT. Go to the door yourself, Sybil. Mary may give the show away!

SYBIL (*crossing to door and listening*). Mary's gone!

(*Voices heard off. GILBERT goes to the door, listening at SYBIL'S side.*)

(*Both then steal on tip-toe to the centre again.*)

(*Re-enter MARY.*)

MARY. It's that boy again, sir. (*Innocently.*) He says he can't make Number 12 hear nohow.

(*Exit MARY. GILBERT goes to door.*)

GILBERT (*calling*). Well, and what do you want this time?

BOY (*without*). Can't make 'em hear, sir. It's all dark!

GILBERT. Oh! Perhaps they've gone to the theatre. They're very fond of the theatre, I know.

BOY (*without*). Well, what am I to do?

GILBERT. Shut the door—gently. Good night. And let this be a lesson to you.

BOY (*without*). Oh, I'm off home!

GILBERT (*comes centre again*). Whew!

SYBIL. Gilbert, we are going to get into the most awful disgrace for this!

GILBERT (*impatiently*). Well, tradespeople should be more careful. They've no right to go about leaving chickens at people's doors as though they were

handbills. Besides, thirteen's an unlucky number for that sort of thing!

(Ring heard off.)

GILBERT. What, another of 'em! We'll have the lights turned out and open the door to nobody!

SYBIL. Yes, and this time they won't go away without it!

GILBERT. Oh; well if the worst comes to the worst . . .

SYBIL. Well . . .?

GILBERT. Why, I shall have to tell some lie or other, for once. Besides, we can put everybody on to Number 12, and they can knock at Number 12 for three weeks, for anything I care.

(Re-enter MARY, back, followed by TOLBOOTH. He is fifty-five, corpulent, very polite.)

MARY *(showing him up)*. A gentleman, sir, from downstairs.

(GILBERT and SYBIL exchange anxious glances.)

(GILBERT gazes at him from behind the lounge, where he has retired as if to entrench himself.)

TOLBOOTH. Good evening—good evening. My name's Tolbooth. Number 2 down in the basement . . .

GILBERT *(prepared for the worst and his self-confidence weakened)*. Ah, good evening!

TOLBOOTH. And I learn from the porter downstairs that you have a telephone here—the only one in these flats. Might I crave the kindness to be allowed to use the instrument on a matter of some urgency?

GILBERT *(immensely relieved, with a sudden burst of joviality)*. Ah! The telephone! Why, certainly—my dear sir! Delighted—why the devil didn't you say so before? Delighted! Shall we go out?

(*He turns quickly to SYBIL, who is now clinging to GILBERT.*)

TOLBOOTH (*continuing*). I'm sure I beg your pardon, but I'm so used to talking to printers and literary men. (*In 'phone again.*) I say, what the devil have you done with my chicken? What? Shut up? *Me* shut up! Oh, the shop. What boy? Never seen him. What! Left it at Number 12? My chicken! And you've sent him back for it? Gone home! (*Screaming it.*) Not with my chicken! Well, I hold you responsible. Apologies? They're no good to a hungry man! I want my chicken that you've had my money for!

(*Puts up receiver and rises, mopping his brow after his exertions—he does not notice the agitation of GILBERT and SYBIL.*)

(*He then takes money from his pocket, crosses to GILBERT, and offers him the coins.*)

TOLBOOTH. I'm very much obliged to you.

GILBERT (*taking coins*). What's this for?

TOLBOOTH. T-twopence for the t-telephone.

GILBERT. My dear sir, absurd!

TOLBOOTH. That makes four and eightpence, and I haven't got my chicken.

(*He backs away from GILBERT, who proffers the coppers unenthusiastically.*)

GILBERT. Oh, well—people in our station of life can't quarrel over coppers, I'll go on the bust with these! (*Aside.*) I mean on the bus. Damned handy for to-morrow! (*He pockets the coins.*)

TOLBOOTH. I've just been inquiring—as perhaps you heard—about a fowl . . . a fowl that has gone astray.

GILBERT. A fowl! Not a prize hen, I trust. (*He*

does a *chanticleer strut*). Not a valuable—high-bred bird?

TOLBOOTH. Oh, no—of the precise value of four and sixpence. But I'm in doubt whether the boy has quite told a straight tale or whether he's gone home with my chicken, or whether . . .

GILBERT. Ah, I see! And so you suspect foul play? That, of course, is merely a play on the word fowl.

TOLBOOTH. Ha, ha! Or whether, fortunately, it is safely at Number 12!

GILBERT (*bustling him out*). Number 12! Immediately opposite, my dear sir, immediately opposite!

TOLBOOTH. Ah, thanks. (*He starts to go and returns.*) Thanks. It was really for Number 2—(*same business*) or I should say (*tapping his chest*) for Number One. But Number 12 has got no business with it at all. (*He starts to go.*)

GILBERT. Of course not. But perhaps they have discovered their mistake by now and are waiting for you to call for it.

TOLBOOTH (*at door*). I'm sure I hope so. The fact is, I'm expecting a guest to dinner, and it's very awkward. . . . Fortunately, he hasn't turned up, but there's my own dinner to be considered, and the truth is, I'm very hungry. (*Same bus.*) Thanks, thanks. Good evening. I sincerely hope that Number 12 found out their mistake (*as he goes out*) before anything of a *culinary nature* happened to my chicken!

(*Exit TOLBOOTH, back.*)

GILBERT. Well, I reckon we've *earned* our dinner!

SYBIL. That poor old man! I nearly blurted out the truth!

GILBERT. Well, I'm jolly glad you didn't. I have done a far, far better thing, for I have sent him to Number 12, where there is no one to tell him the dreadful truth.

(*Angry voices heard off.*)

Listen! Listen!

(*Voice continues.*)

SYBIL. Number Twelve's at home!

GILBERT. Good Lord! No!

(*Amid the noise outside can be distinguished the words, in broken English, "I tell you I know nodings of your shickens! Go away and get sober! Go away!"*)

SYBIL. Oh, this is too awful for words! It isn't only stealing! It might almost lead to murder!

GILBERT (*grimly*). It will! How was I to know that that fool of a Number Twelve would come back?

(*Voices continue.*)

SYBIL. Well, let's call the poor old man back and throw ourselves on his mercy!

GILBERT. If we did that, how could we throw ourselves on his chicken?

SYBIL. Gilbert, let's make a clean breast of it!

GILBERT (*frantically*). How can we, when the clean breast of it's in our oven!

(*Re-enter TOLBOOTH, breathless.*)

(*SYBIL clings to GILBERT's hand.*)

TOLBOOTH. I'm sorry—very sorry—but would you mind coming—to testify before this foreign gentleman . . . ?

GILBERT (*aghast*). *II*

TOLBOOTH. Yes, and swear you heard me being told on the telephone that my chicken was at Number 12!

GILBERT. But I *didn't* hear it. I was standing over there!

TOLBOOTH. Yes, but he says he has only just come

in, and that he's packing up to catch the nine o'clock to "shoin his wive andt familee," and that he has never seen my chicken!

GILBERT. Well, perhaps his wife and family have taken it with them.

TOLBOOTH. No, sir, no! *I can smell it cooking!* Can't you?

(GILBERT and SYBIL clutch each other violently. They all sniff.)

GILBERT. There certainly does . . . seem . . . a rather faint. . . .

(TOLBOOTH goes back vigorously sniffing, leaving them standing R.)

SYBIL (*half hysterical*). Yes, I can perceive . . . a faint . . . !

(*She suddenly shrieks, hysterically.*)

GILBERT (*at her side*). Pull yourself together—and go and close that kitchen door till I've got him out of the house!

(*He pushes SYBIL off R., and then goes to stand again at TOLBOOTH'S side. TOLBOOTH is still sniffing.*)

GILBERT. No (*sniff*). No! (*decisively*). That's not (*sniff*) chicken! A duck—(*sniff*) perhaps. . . . But I don't think it's chicken!

TOLBOOTH. I *do*! And it's *my* chicken!

GILBERT. Well, of course, I don't know what your chicken smells like. But I think it was only your heated imagination.

TOLBOOTH (*sniff*). Certainly, it doesn't seem quite so strong now. I'm so hungry that it would indeed be exasperating if I got nothing of my own chicken but the smell from another man's oven.

GILBERT (*suddenly*). My dear sir! My *dear* sir!

A thought strikes me! A regular merry thought! Why not take pot-luck and dine with us?

TOLBOOTH. With you? But—but . . .

GILBERT. Oh, never mind the buts! You must! (*Casual, lofty tone.*) We had really thought of going to the Savoy for dinner. But luckily . . .

TOLBOOTH. Well, I sincerely hope that I and my confounded chicken haven't spoiled your evening!

GILBERT. Far from it, my dear Mr. Tolbooth—far from it. Then you'll stay?

TOLBOOTH. Well, thanks, I'm so infernally hungry. But your wife . . .

(*Re-enter SYBIL, R.*)

GILBERT. She'll be perfectly delighted. Sybil, Mr. Tolbooth will do us the honour to join us in our frugal repast.

SYBIL. Gilbert! (*She collapses, lounge R.*)

(*TOLBOOTH looks at her, conscious that the invitation is not seconded.*)

TOLBOOTH (*regretfully*). Thanks—but I'm afraid I couldn't impose myself on you.

GILBERT. Nonsense! My wife is merely reluctant to put before you such frugal fare as we have to offer you!

SYBIL (*still half hysterical*). We shall be delighted, Mr. Tolbooth.

GILBERT. Exactly! Pray sit down! (*He pushes him almost violently into a chair.*) Please let me explain things. Fact is, my doctor has advised me that as a literary man—and—er—subject to—er—attacks of morbid sluggishness of—the—er—cerebral regions—due to gastronomic indiscretions and all that sort of thing—er—I should be well advised to limit the number of my dishes. "Be sparse!" he says, and sparse it is! And so . . . the . . . er . . . By the way, what *is* the menu to-night, dear?

SYBIL (*with an effort*). Chi-chi . . . I mean, a little fowl!

GILBERT. A little fowl! No, really? How extraordinary! Of course! Tuesdays and Thursdays a little fowl! And the fact is, Mr. Tolbooth, that I have to be very careful in the matter of vegetables, and limit myself to just about *one* potato—no green vegetables whatever . . . and perhaps just a smattering of macaroni . . . or a little rice . . . a *very* little rice.

TOLBOOTH. How dreadful!

GILBERT. But if a nice juicy chicken. . . . (*To SYBIL.*) I think you said chicken, dear?—and a few pommes à la nature—in other words, plain boiled—and a lee-tle touch of cheese—

(*Looking at SYBIL, who anxiously shakes her head violently.*)

No—no cheese—and then, by way of dessert, a very fine banana and the choice of two apples . . .

TOLBOOTH. Oh, pray . . .!

GILBERT. Not in the least! To-night all we have is yours! (*Ringing bell.*)

TOLBOOTH. Really, you are *too* hospitable! Did I hear you say you pursue a literary career, Mr . . . er . . .?

GILBERT (*pointing to desk*). Yes, and there's the litter! My name's Warren—Gilbert Warren.

TOLBOOTH (*as if trying to recollect the name*). Gilbert Warren!

(*Re-enter MARY.*)

GILBERT. Mary! lay the chicken—I mean the dinner—in the other room—for three. (*Careless tone.*) Only three to-night.

(*Exit MARY.*)

TOLBOOTH. Gilbert Warren! Now I've got it! Well, what an extraordinary coincidence!

GILBERT. Why? . . . What? . . .

TOLBOOTH. Really most remarkable! Have you by chance written any novels, Mr. Warren?

GILBERT. Stacks of 'em! As a matter of fact, they aren't actually published yet.

TOLBOOTH. And may I ask if a novel called *Twin Souls* is one of them?

GILBERT. *Twin Souls!* It's my masterpiece! Why, what . . .?

TOLBOOTH. Why, I have only this very day recommended it *most warmly* to my firm!

GILBERT. What, to North & West!

TOLBOOTH. Exactly! I read fiction for them!

GILBERT (*rushing to SYBIL*). Sybil! (*Warm embrace.*) My dear sir!

(*Grasps his hands, and then rushes back to SYBIL, whirling her round in a dance, into which he then drags TOLBOOTH willy-nilly.*)

TOLBOOTH (*breaking away*). What a festive evening!

GILBERT (*suddenly*). And how much do you think I can have on account?

TOLBOOTH. Ah! I never touch the business side! But that book, sir, should bring you fame and fortune.

SYBIL. I think his strong point is fiction, Mr. Tolbooth.

TOLBOOTH. Yes, he tells a story remarkably well.

GILBERT. As you say, Mr. Tolbooth, this is indeed a memorable evening. And my only regret is that . . . owing entirely to doctor's orders . . . I haven't a drain of anything in the house to drink your jolly good health in!

TOLBOOTH. My dear Mr. Warren. Listen! I have a bottle or two of choice Burgundy downstairs that was to have washed my own chicken down . . .

GILBERT. Burgundy! Mr. Tolbooth! Not Burgundy . . . !

TOLBOOTH. Yes, sir, two bottles of the best. And

if you will allow me to send your maid downstairs with a message to my housekeeper . . .

GILBERT. But, my dear Mr. Tolbooth, you're the universal provider!

TOLBOOTH. Not at all. If I share your chicken you must share my wine!

(Re-enter MARY, R.)

MARY. Dinner is served, sir.

TOLBOOTH. Ah, allow me! *(To SYBIL.)*

(Exit MARY, R.)

(SYBIL takes TOLBOOTH'S proffered arm, and they go towards door R.)

(As they reach it, TOLBOOTH turns round towards GILBERT, speaking over his shoulder.)

TOLBOOTH. How very, very fortunate that I called after my chicken!

(Exeunt.)

GILBERT *(twirling gaily round on one leg)*. Yes, but I'm jolly glad your chicken called first!

(A sudden thought strikes him, and he pauses in following them.)

I wonder whether I dare touch him for that four and sixpence!

CURTAIN.

END.

MRS. PARTRIDGE PRESENTS

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The characters, scenes and situations are thoroughly up-to-date in this altogether delightful American comedy. The heroine is a woman of tremendous energy, who manages a business—as she manages everything—with great success, and at home presides over the destinies of a growing son and daughter. Her struggle to give the children the opportunities she herself had missed, and the children's ultimate revolt against her well-meant management—that is the basis of the plot. The son who is cast for the part of artist and the daughter who is to go on the stage offer numerous opportunities for the development of the comic possibilities in the theme.

The play is one of the most delightful, yet thought-provoking American comedies of recent years, and is warmly recommended to all amateur groups. (Royalty on application.) Price, 75 Cents.

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Melodrama in 3 acts. By Eleanor Robson and Harriet Ford. 8 males, 3 females. 2 interiors. Modern costumes. Plays 2¼ hours.

"Philip Vantine has bought a rare copy of an original Boule cabinet and ordered it shipped to his New York home from Paris. When it arrives it is found to be the original itself, the possession of which is desired by many strange people. Before the mystery concerned with the cabinet's shipment can be cleared up, two persons meet mysterious death fooling with it and the happiness of many otherwise happy actors is threatened" (Burns Mantle). A first-rate mystery play, comprising all the elements of suspense, curiosity, comedy and drama. "In the Next Room" is quite easy to stage. It can be unreservedly recommended to high schools and colleges. (Royalty, twenty-five dollars.)
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ARE YOU A MASON?

Faree in 3 acts. By Leo Ditrichstein. 7 males, 7 females. Modern costumes. Plays $2\frac{1}{4}$ hours. 1 interior.

"Are You a Mason?" is one of those delightful farces like "Charley's Aunt" that are always fresh. "A mother and a daughter," says the critic of the New York *Herald*, "had husbands who account for absences from the joint household on frequent evenings, falsely pretending to be Masons. The men do not know each other's duplicity, and each tells his wife of having advanced to leadership in his lodge. The older woman was so well pleased with her husband's supposed distinction in the order that she made him promise to put up the name of a visiting friend for membership. Further perplexity over the principal liar arose when a suitor for his second daughter's hand proved to be a real Mason. . . . To tell the story of the play would require volumes, its complications are so numerous. It is a house of cards. One card wrongly placed and the whole thing would collapse. But it stands, an example of remarkable ingenuity. You wonder at the end of the first act how the fun can be kept up on such a slender foundation. But it continues and grows to the last curtain." One of the most hilariously amusing farces ever written, especially suited to schools and Masonic Lodges. (Royalty, twenty-five dollars.) Price, 75 Cents.

KEMPY

A delightful comedy in 3 acts. By J. C. Nugent and Elliott Nugent. 4 males, 4 females. 1 interior throughout. Costumes, modern. Plays $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours.

No wonder "Kempy" has been such a tremendous hit in New York, Chicago—wherever it has played. It snaps with wit and humor of the most delightful kind. It's electric. It's small-town folk perfectly pictured. Full of types of varied sorts, each one done to a turn and served with zestful sauce. An ideal entertainment for amusement purposes. The story is about a high-falutin' daughter who in a fit of pique marries the young plumber-architect, who comes to fix the water pipes, just because he "understands" her, having read her book and having sworn to marry the authoress. But in that story lies all the humor that kept the audience laughing every second of every act. Of course there are lots of ramifications, each of which bears its own brand of laughter-making potentials. But the plot and the story are not the main things. There is, for instance, the work of the company. The fun growing out of this family mixup is lively and clean. (Royalty, twenty-five dollars.) Price, 75 Cents.

ON THE HIRING LINE

Comedy in 3 acts, by Harvey O'Higgins and Harriet Ford. 5 males, 4 females. Interior throughout. Costumes, modern. Plays 2½ hours.

Sherman Fessenden, unable to induce servants to remain for any reasonable length of time at his home, hits upon the novel expedient of engaging detectives to serve as domestics.

His second wife, an actress, weary of the country and longing for Broadway, has succeeded in discouraging every other cook and butler against remaining long at the house, believing that by so doing she will win her husband to her theory that country life is dead. So she is deeply disappointed when she finds she cannot discourage the new servants.

The sleuths, believing they had been called to report on the actions of those living with the Fessendens, proceeded to warn Mr. Fessenden that his wife has been receiving love-notes from Steve Mark, an actor friend, and that his daughter has been planning to elope with a thief.

One sleuth causes an uproar in the house, making a mess of the situations he has witnessed. Mr. Fessenden, however, has learned a lesson and is quite willing to leave the servant problem to his wife thereafter. (Royalty, twenty-five dollars.)

Price, 75 Cents.

A FULL HOUSE

A farcical comedy in 3 acts. By Fred Jackson. 7 males, 7 females. One interior scene. Modern costumes. Time, 3½ hours.

Imagine a reckless and wealthy youth who writes ardent love letters to a designing chorus girl, an attorney brother-in-law who steals the letters and then gets his hand-bag mixed up with the grip of a burglar who has just stolen a valuable necklace from the mother of the indiscreet youth, and the efforts of the crook to recover his plunder, as incidents in the story of a play in which the swiftness of the action never halts for an instant. Not only are the situations screamingly funny but the lines themselves hold a fund of humor at all times. This newest and cleverest of all farces was written by Fred Jackson, the well-known short-story writer, and is backed up by the prestige of an impressive New York success and the promise of unlimited fun presented in the most attractive form. A cleaner, cleverer farce has not been seen for many a long day. "A Full House" is a house full of laughs. (Royalty, twenty-five dollars.)

Price, 75 Cents.

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